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ADDRESS  
OF THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
UNITED STATES

AT

ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
THURSDAY AFTERNOON  
OCTOBER 27, 1921



WASHINGTON  
1921

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## ADDRESS AT ATLANTA, OCTOBER 27, 1921.

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FELLOW AMERICANS: I can not tell you how glad I am to be here, to greet you men and women of Atlanta, of Georgia, and the South, and to receive this testimony of devotion to our common country. Be assured that, much as I crave, and wish to deserve, your good will, I shall not mistakenly assume that such a greeting as this is for me, or ever could be for any one man. I recognize it as the tribute which a great people pays to a constituted authority in its public life. It is the reflection of the spirit which makes our popularly governed institutions secure. But you will permit me to say, from my heart, that nowhere else do they do these things with quite the same zest and flavor and convincing enthusiasm which spice the hospitality of your wonderful South. As private citizen or public official, it has always been to me an especial pleasure to come to the South. As a young man I was very near indeed to becoming a resident of the South and a citizen of your neighboring State, Tennessee. Even for the sake of paying a compliment, I shall not tell you I am entirely sorry I didn't come; it might imply a lack of appreciation for the somewhat notable kindnesses that have been extended to me by the people of my own State, operating in conjunction with a very impressive company of friends in other parts.

To come to Georgia is to come to the heart of the South. To come to Georgia on this, of all days of the year—the birthday of Roosevelt—is to realize that the heart of the South throbs for all the Nation. To the making of that typical American of the new era went equally the warmer strains of the Old South and the sturdy stock that gave the Nation its Empire State.

So it is good, in greeting you men and women of Georgia, to recall the career of that outstanding American who in his life, as in his lineage, taught us how much we are prospered and exalted because of being united. And, coming thus among you, it is peculiarly a satisfaction to speak from the shadow of the shaft which you have reared to the memory of one who taught a reunited nation its duties, its obligations, its possibilities. For I recall the thrill with which I read, as a young man, the address of Henry W. Grady to the New England Club; that most famous oration, I think, of its generation; that inspiring call to a nation to awaken to itself, to understand that its yesterday was dead, its to-morrow pregnant with magnificent opportunity.

If ever one man was ordained to speak with the tongue of conviction and the voice of a great people, that man was Grady. Gifted with the poet's imagery, the seer's wisdom, the plain man's humor, and the statesman's vision, he pretended to be neither poet, seer, nor statesman; he sought no public place, but preferred the private post close to his people. But somehow it was his to understand and interpret the longing of the Nation for a true and perfect reunion. He appraised the difficulty of fashioning a new temple of concord and hope out of disappointment and sorrow incident to conflict, but he saw beneath the surface the longing to develop a common inheritance, he caught the aspirations for a common glory, he touched the chords of sympathy which echoed the note of common rejoicing.

With heart aglow and tongue inspired, he felt it his duty to preach the gospel of new understanding, and having uttered his new gospel at home, he came north, the evangel of a new day, and made his New England speech. Since that night he has belonged not to you of Georgia but to the nation, to the truly reunited nation, of which, in his day, he was the foremost apostle and spokesman. The South never had a more loyal or jealous son; but he saw, with an eye for wider scopes, that this people was not to be divided. And he preached that gospel North and South; the gospel of unity and common destiny; and when he died untimely, at 38 years of age, the nation which so soon had learned to love him, bowed its head in a universal sorrow. Reading his passionate pleadings for a nation-wide understanding, I can not but feel that he would have been content to go as he did if he could have known how close that tie of common sorrow would bring the people for whom his life had been the labor of a supreme love.

How strangely has destiny interwoven the parts in this drama of a Nation's restoration! The same year of 1889 that saw Grady lay away with boy's laurels on his proud and noble brow, saw another son of a mother of Georgia and the South entered in the career of national service. In that year Theodore Roosevelt, following his impetuous appeals for better political morals at the Baltimore civil service conference, was appointed by President Harrison to the Civil Service Commission, and his national career began. A son of the East and the South, but already adopted by the West, he had become a devoted admirer of that son of the South whom all the Nation had taken to its heart. Think of them, you Georgians, you men and women of the whole South, think of their services and careers, and tell me, for such sons as these would you wish to provide a lesser stage than that of the united country on which they played their part? I know, you could not, and never will. For geniuses such as these you furnish, you must at least let us afford a fitting scene and setting. No "put up fiction" for such as they!

The other day there came into my hands a volume of the letters of a group of eminent Georgians of the Civil War and reconstruction period. In the main, they represented the correspondence of Alexander H. Stephens, Howell Cobb, Robert Toombs, and Gov. Joe Brown. Only recently published, they proved fascinating reading as I turned the pages and felt myself admitted to the very inner thoughts which these leaders of the Confederacy were thinking in the years immediately following the war. Especially was I interested in the extensive correspondence between these southern leaders and prominent men of the North, which was carried on at that period. It was nothing less than astonishing to note how little of bitterness, of resentment, of hatred, and recalcitrance was manifested on either side. With almost no exception, they breathed the fine spirit of chivalry; of readiness to accept in whole heart and good nature the arbitrament of the war. They held a flavor of something more than resignation, as if already the writers were realizing how fortunate it was that union should have been preserved. They were all back in the harness, working for the restoration of their State, their people, their preserved country. They wrote thoughtful, earnest counsels as to the wiser policies in State and Nation, seeking always to make their friends in the North understand how complete and sincere was the South's acceptance of its place in the restored Union, how determined it was to contribute its utmost to a perfect national accord. At times they sounded the note of disappointment that the North seemed slow to accept their protestations as in complete good faith, and be assured that they could be dealt with in complete confidence. But they were seldom impatient: they held their heads high, had no apologies to make for the past, but were looking clear-eyed to the future of indissoluble union.

That was the spirit which made reconstruction, despite bungling and some exceptional manifestations of acerbity, on the whole so rapid and effective a process, when measured by like incidents in human history. They wanted to be taken back into full fellowship. "We would rather have one immigrant from the North than fifty from Europe," wrote one, a few years after Appomattox; and he urged his Northern friend to make the Northern people understand how welcome they would be. Not even the unreconstructible hatred of Old Thad Stevens could maintain an effective front against such appeals as that. The North did come to you, with olive branch instead of sword; and you went to the North and West, and became full partners in making that new empire which together we carved out of the trans-Missouri wilderness; and now truly there can be described no sectional division of this land.

Recently, passing in a motor car through a section where historical interest has inspired the setting of tablets marking Mason and Dixon's line, I heard a group of highly intelligent people quarreling about its geography, half of them insisting that it didn't belong there at all, but some hundreds of miles farther south! Neither the atlases nor the election returns give us nowadays a dependable basis for judgment of what is South and what North; we have been politically annexing you—when you were not politically taking us into camp—and we have been socially, industrially, economically invading and seizing as much of your imperial opportunities as we could get our hands on. We have been pooling our capital with your brains and resources, and both sides earning good dividends on the transaction, and all the time jointly making a greater republic.

It would be hard to find a more fitting platform from which to preach a gospel of confidence, courage, and determination than is afforded here in your wonderful city of Atlanta. In one of his speeches—I think it was—the one at the New England Society dinner—Henry Grady, turning to Gen. Sherman, who sat near him, observed that Gen. Sherman was “considered an able man in our parts, though some people think he is a kind of careless man about fire.” That grim joke contained the spirit of the South, the courage of Atlanta, the eternal vision of the brighter side that is so natural to you people of the land of sunshine. One who comes to your metropolis to-day can not but realize how useless to attempt, with fire and sword, to discourage such a people as this, to extinguish their enthusiasm, to daunt their matchless courage. What chance is there to keep down a people who, when you burn their house, rear in its place a palace of marble; and when amid the passions of war you drive them in thousands from their home, return in tens of thousands to build it into a metropolis? The reason why the South recovered so soon from the war was that it was made up of just that sort of people. But I ought to say, because I speak as a son of a veteran of that conflict, that the North had no desire to destroy. It was merely the combat for understanding, cruel though it was, and a battle to preserve the great Ark of the Covenant, in which preservation we continuously rejoice to-day.

It has seemed to me, many times in the period since the World War ended, that the world at large might well let us show it the marvel which was wrought through a reunited and restored America. Because there was the will to get down to work, to cease repentings and regret, we have among us erected here, out of the wreckage that our war wrought, a country in which we may fitly take the pride which every American feels.



Who would have ours less than the great, rich, progressive, powerful, and enlightened America which we justly boast to-day? Who would have it less a figure in the world than it has been in these years of crisis and disaster? What friend of civilization, of Christianity, of human advancement, would have wished our part less than it has been? Who among us all is not proud that we were able to participate very notably in the rescue of humanity in the struggle which menaced its very existence? Who would have us relinquish now our service for a better civilization?

Surely, we will go on, developing the nationality that has given us faith and weight and power for the tasks of the past, knowing there are other tasks in the future which will demand the utmost we can contribute to them. We have learned, along with the rest, that mankind must go forward or backward as a whole; it is not to be expected that some sectors shall advance as others retire. Either the race will advance or it will retrograde; it will not stand still.

It has had a tremendous lesson, and I am one of those who firmly believe that this lesson will be analyzed, tested, scrutinized, and made to afford us at last a direction for future effort. It is not possible to believe that all the lessons of all the yesterdays will have gone in vain. The increase of education, of the studious habit, of social consciousness, can not but bring us nearer to agreement about some few fundamentals.

I believe, for instance, that every family which has lost a member in the struggle to save mankind from absolutism; every citizen-soldier who has given years and sufferings to that cause; every gold-star mother or maimed veteran, will agree that peace is preferable to war, and that to train a world in the ways of peace is better than to prepare it for war. I would not have you misconstrue. I believe it wholly consistent to preach peace and its triumphs in that convincing sincerity which an unselfish nation commands and yet make sure about our proper defense.

Manifestly, mankind is disposed to try that experiment. If, trying it, nations shall fail, it will be no fault of the United States of America. We are ready to offer a helping hand in the new path. We have tendered our invitation, and the cordial acceptance which has come from every quarter leads to earnest hope for good results. We Americans have learned the lesson, on both the national and world scale. We fought our war of sections and systems, and decided forever in favor of peace and unity. Our own experience has taught us that we may hope that a like decision will be reached by a world reasoning amid the convictions which follow in the wake of a tragedy supreme.

It should not be needful for me to repeat that, in whatever contribution we can make to the establishment of a better order, we shall

not surrender any of our national independence. America will be for America first; but it will never be a merely selfish America, imagining to prosper by the misfortunes of others. It will stand for the cooperations, the mutual helpfulness, the wide perceptions which mankind needs to cheer and speed it on the way to the brighter and better realm of peace restored and effectually assured, of progress resumed, and righteous aspirations impelling ever greater achievements and ever higher attainments.





